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Chicago Hustle And Flow: Gangs, Gangsta Rap, And Social Class



Synopsis

On September 4, 2012, Joseph Coleman, an eighteen-year-old aspiring gangsta rapper, was gunned down in the Englewood neighborhood of Chicago. Police immediately began investigating the connections between Coleman's murder and an online war of words and music he was having with another Chicago rapper in a rival gang. In *Chicago Hustle and Flow*, Geoff Harkness points out how common this type of incident can be when rap groups form as extensions of gangs. Gangs and rap music, he argues, can be a deadly combination. Set in one of the largest underground music scenes in the nation, this book takes readers into the heart of gangsta rap culture in Chicago. From the electric buzz of nightclubs to the sights and sounds of bedroom recording studios, Harkness presents gripping accounts of the lives, beliefs, and ambitions of the gang members and rappers with whom he spent six years. A music genre obsessed with authenticity, gangsta rap promised those from crime-infested neighborhoods a ticket out of poverty. But while firsthand experiences with gangs and crime gave rappers a leg up, it also meant carrying weapons and traveling collectively for protection. Street gangs serve as a fan base and provide protection to rappers who bring in income and help to recruit for the gang. In examining this symbiotic relationship, *Chicago Hustle and Flow* ultimately illustrates how class stratification creates and maintains inequalities, even at the level of a local rap-music scene.

Book Information

Paperback: 264 pages

Publisher: Univ Of Minnesota Press (September 1, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0816692297

ISBN-13: 978-0816692293

Product Dimensions: 5.5 x 0.7 x 8.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 11.2 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 5.0 out of 5 stars 1 customer review

Best Sellers Rank: #272,140 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #108 in Books > Arts & Photography > Music > Musical Genres > Ethnic & International > Ethnomusicology #701 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Sociology > Urban #1480 in Books > Humor & Entertainment > Pop Culture > General

Customer Reviews

"The assistant sociology professor at Iowa's Morningside College spent several years observing

and documenting the local hip-hop underground on the road to getting his PhD at Northwestern. While the title of this rather academic text hints at Harkness's intimate, sometimes engrossing perspective on Chicago gangsta rap, he cast a wide enough net to show the challenges aspiring Chicago MCs faced when this city was still considered a hip-hop flyover zone." -- Chicago Reader "For those who live within the lower classes of society--especially minorities--jail and prison are almost expected facts of life, especially since the drug war started. For the rest of us--including academics who teach criminology classes--it is a life we have little understanding of. This is one reason why this book is so important. It is not just about rappers and gangs. It is about a bigger picture, one that is a reflection of a class and racially divided society as illustrated by the recent killings of Blacks by the police." - Randall G. Shelden, Criminal Justice Review "By brilliantly connecting life stories of different rappers and ethnographic vignettes from his fieldwork, he offers readers a comprehension of the daily realities of young men who live in precarious neighborhoods and are involved in the gangsta rap microscene ... Harkness's detailed depictions and comparisons have a sensory power which at times might well compare to the lyrics his research participants use to convey emotions."- Sterre Gilsing, International Journal of Urban and Regional Research "Geoff Harkness's book is a sincere and genuine urban ethnography of the underground rap scene in Chicago in the post millennium period, but moreover, it is a courageous assertion of the role of class disparity in shaping both the experiences and trajectories of young people who come from divergent class backgrounds, but whose participation in a much-maligned musical subculture obscures the complexity and class diversity among them."- Robert Weide, Ethnic and Racial Studies "Chicago Hustle and Flow is required reading for anyone wanting a peek inside a major city's underground rap scene. Harkness expertly takes the reader from the electric buzz of nightclubs to the sights and sounds of bedroom recording studios to tell the gripping accounts of the lives and ambitions of aspiring rappers--a world most of us are unfamiliar with." - Charis E. Kubrin, American Sociological Review "In shifting the emphasis away from textual analysis of rap songs and toward artists' understandings of their own practices and identities, Chicago Hustle and Flow avoids the most common pitfalls of hip-hop studies texts. Many scholars have written about gangsta rap, but Geoff Harkness's committed qualitative approach and vividly drawn setting are deep breaths of fresh air." Michael Jeffries, author of *Thug Life: Race, Gender, and the Meaning of Hip-Hop*

Geoff Harkness is assistant professor of sociology at Rhode Island College.

Chicago Hustle and Flow is a page-turner that gives a vivid, inside look at the lives of two rival gangsta rap groups and other key rappers in the Chicago scene. There are two principal storylines going on. One is the lives and struggles of the rappers and their relationship with gangs, hustling drugs, and the underground rap scene. Harkness, who is well-versed in the genre, situates the narratives but gives the rappers plenty of space to share their own accounts of their lives and the scene. The larger story looks at definitions of authenticity in rap, the importance of social class and the structural limitations to the rappers' dreams. One of the big takeaways portrayed in the book is a side of gangsta rappers seldom portrayed in the media: their mainstream embrace of capitalism and the American Dream. Despite the massive barriers, gangsta rappers interviewed consistently echoed the belief that rap was their ticket to a better life and that consistent, hard work to produce a quality product would make them millions and provide a future for their families. It sounds like any business graduate entering Wall Street. The book is full of insights like this and I recommend it for hip-hop fans or anyone interested in social class.

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